

7 November 2002

English only

Fifty-seventh session
Agenda item 52
Strengthening of the United Nations system

Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change

Responses to issues raised and supplementary information

1. This conference room paper is intended to provide responses to and supplementary information on the major issues raised by various individual Member States and groups of Member States on the report of the Secretary-General on "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1). The paper covers issues related to human rights, partnerships with civil society and human resources (actions 2-5, 19, 20, 25-29, 32 and 34), to be considered at the open-ended informal consultations of the General Assembly to be held on Tuesday, 12 November 2002.

Doing what matters

Action 2

2. At the request of Governments, the United Nations supports human rights capacity-building at the national level. What action 2 seeks to achieve is improved inter-agency cooperation geared to supporting the initiatives of Governments themselves.

3. The provision of technical cooperation to Governments, at their request, is the topic of regular discussions and resolutions in the Commission on Human Rights and other forums. Thus, earlier this year, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Commission on Human Rights on advisory services and technical cooperation in the field of human rights (E/CN.4/2002/116), in which the general policy was described as follows:

"The Technical Cooperation Programme of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supports countries in promoting and protecting all human rights at the national and regional level by incorporating international human rights standards in national laws, policies and practices and by building sustainable national capacities to implement



these standards and ensure respect for human rights. ... The Programme is carried out at the request of the concerned Government”.

4. The ground rules for technical cooperation will remain. The core aim is to advance the implementation of treaties which Member States have ratified — in full cooperation with Member States and at their request.

5. At the request of Member States, particular attention will be paid to such key areas as providing information and jurisprudence on human rights norms to judges and lawyers; helping national human rights institutions in areas where Governments ask for support; providing support on issues of non-discrimination, equality, gender rights and race relations commissions; providing human rights information and training to law-enforcement, prison and military personnel; and helping to provide manuals and materials on human rights education and on civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, including the progressive realization of rights to food, education and health.

6. Different parts of the United Nations system already act to support, at the request of governments, national courts or other institutions, as well as projects dealing with economic, social and cultural rights and civil and political rights. There is no change in mandate envisaged for the resident coordinator.

Action 3

7. In seeking to support the human rights treaty bodies in their quest for improved methods of work, the treaty bodies will themselves be consulted first. This process is already actively under way.

8. After a process of consultation with the treaty bodies, approaches and methods that attract broad consensus will then be discussed with States parties to the treaties.

9. The role of the Secretariat will be to facilitate consultations. At the end of the day, decisions on working methods are for the treaty bodies themselves, and, in the final analysis, it is for the States parties to treaties to pronounce on any ideas for structural adjustments.

Action 4

10. The special procedures are created by, report to and are accountable to the Commission on Human Rights.

11. What action 4 strives for is a process of consultation with mandate holders intended to strengthen the system of special procedures and modernize their methods of work.

12. Consultations will take place with the mandate holders, and the Commission on Human Rights, as the parent body, will be kept abreast throughout the process.

Action 5

13. As for all reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Secretary-General will report to the General Assembly on the implementation of the OIOS recommendations for managerial improvements in OHCHR. The process of implementing the OIOS recommendations is well under way, and significant managerial improvements have already been made in OHCHR.

Serving Member States better

Action 19

14. The high-level panel on the relationship between the United Nations and civil society will be composed of eminent persons from all parts of the world, both developed and developing. The panel will be encouraged to consult broadly with Member States and representatives of civil society. Their findings will be transmitted to the Member States. Determining modalities for civil society participation is a responsibility of the Member States.

Action 20

15. The proposal for a Partnerships Office recognizes the increased interest from private sector firms and foundations in collaborating with the United Nations on a global level. The report of the Secretary-General on cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners, in particular the private sector (A/56/323 and Corr.1), provided a comprehensive analysis of existing levels of cooperation. The Partnerships Office will operate within the framework of guidance provided by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/76 of 11 December 2001. The comprehensive report requested in the resolution will be provided to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

The Organization and its people: investing in excellence

16. As part of the first round of Secretariat reform, a new strategy for human resources management was proposed in 2000, comprising 10 major building blocks (A/55/253 and Corr.1). This strategy was endorsed by Member States in its resolution 55/258 of 14 June 2001. A recent report of the Secretary-General (A/57/293) outlines the goals, achievements to date and future activities in each of the areas listed above. Considerable progress has been made, most notably in the establishment of core competencies, staff development activities and an enhanced system of performance management. One of the most significant changes — a new staff selection system that integrates recruitment, placement, managed mobility and promotion — came into effect on 1 May 2002.

17. The measures outlined in section VI of the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the United Nations: an agenda for further change (A/57/387 and Corr.1) fit within the strategic framework outlined above and are intended to build on the work already done.

Action 25

18. Mobility, defined as movement within and between functions, departments, occupations, duty stations and organizations of the United Nations system, is now expected of all staff. It is therefore essential that the Organization's rules and practices not only enable staff to meet this expectation, but also actively encourage and reward the flexibility and mobility of staff. The Office of Human Resources Management will undertake a review of the contractual arrangements and benefits offered to Secretariat staff. Existing consultative mechanisms with the agencies, funds and programmes will be used to review those issues. Inter-agency agreements

will also be reviewed to ensure that staff can move between functions and organizations with ease. The review will be completed by the end of 2003.

19. Any budgetary implications arising from the reviews and related actions will be submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee in due course.

20. For qualified spouses, the Secretariat would seek an understanding with the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies that qualified spouses should be considered for vacant positions arising in the same duty station.

Actions 26 to 29

21. In order to reflect the fact that the contribution of both Professional and General Service staff is equally important to the work of Organization, all staff members shall be referred to as international civil servants as from 1 January 2003. This measure will neither affect established remuneration principles nor have budgetary implications.

22. None of the measures envisaged in actions 26 to 29 affect the Secretary-General's commitment to ensuring that the composition of the Secretariat remains geographically balanced. The Secretariat will continue its efforts to meet quotas for unrepresented and underrepresented countries through the national competitive examination and other targeted recruitment mechanisms.

23. Flexible working arrangements mean a redistribution of normal working hours. Such arrangements will be made available to staff in general, but individual arrangements will be subject to approval by the programme manager. That approval is always conditioned on a determination that flexibility is consistent with the needs of service and that there would be no adverse effect on the delivery of the programme. Flexible arrangements would be terminated or suspended if there were any adverse effect on programme delivery or on the quality of services offered. There is no link between the availability of flexible working arrangements and the contractual status of the staff members involved.

Action 32

24. The measures envisaged under this action would take into account guidance given by the General Assembly in connection with recent reports of the Secretary-General. In his report on accountability and responsibility (A/55/270), the Secretary-General delineated the continuum between responsibility, authority and accountability, and presented the elements of an integrated and effective system of accountability. Following its consideration of this report, the General Assembly, in its resolution 55/258, requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve accountability and responsibility in the reform of human resources management as well as the monitoring and control mechanisms and procedures and to report thereon at the fifty-seventh session. As set out in the report on the implementation of human resources management reform (A/57/293), every effort is made by the Secretariat to ensure that delegation of authority is accompanied, among other things, by clearly defined lines of authority and accountability, as well as appropriate training and support. The report of the Secretary-General on the monitoring capacity in the Office of Human Resources Management (A/57/276) is also currently before the

General Assembly, and describes current as well as prospective monitoring activities of that office.

Action 34

25. Through the creation of a new ombudsman function and the appointment of the first Ombudsman by the Secretary-General in July 2002, an alternative method of dispute resolution has now been made available to staff and management. Other proposals relating to the administration of justice are outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/56/800), which is currently before the General Assembly. Under action 34 of the reform report, the Secretary-General intends to conduct an internal review to identify further areas for improvement and to ensure that the internal justice system is fair, efficient and responsive to the due process rights of staff members.

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Responses to issues raised and supplementary information

Aligning resources with priorities

1. This conference room paper is intended to provide responses to and supplementary information on the major issues raised by various individual Member States and groups of Member States on the report of the Secretary-General on "Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1). The paper covers issues related to aligning resources with priorities (actions 21-23), to be considered at the open-ended informal consultations of the General Assembly scheduled for Thursday, 14 November 2002.

Action 21

Medium-term plan

2. Under the current four-year medium-term plan, relevant chapters of the plan are revised every two years to incorporate required programme changes resulting from mandate changes. The revisions are considered by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee one year before the submission of the proposed programme budget covering the last two years of the plan. In reviewing the revisions to the medium-term plan, the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee presently need two separate documents: the medium-term plan it had approved two years previously and the revisions containing changes thereto, presented in separate documents according to programme. The process is inherently cumbersome and, being piecemeal, lacks comprehensiveness. To allow for an easier and more coherent review by both the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee of the translation of legislative mandates into programmes, a medium-term plan covering two years is being proposed.



3. A two-year medium-term plan will better reflect the most recent decisions taken and the latest priority directives of intergovernmental bodies. A two-year medium-term plan covering the same period as the biennial budget and being considered simultaneously with the budget outline will further facilitate the intergovernmental review of both the budget outline and the proposed programme budget.

4. The current medium-term plan reflects programme objectives derived from legislative mandates and expected accomplishments proposed by the Secretariat for implementation any time within a four-year period. Present arrangements reflecting differing time horizons lead to some ambiguity as to the responsibility of programme managers for achieving expected accomplishments within a given period. It is anticipated that a two-year planning period will provide a better focus for accountability as to expected accomplishments. While long-term objectives, in fulfilment of legislative mandates, would continue to be reflected under the "objectives" heading of each subprogramme, the expected accomplishments would be strictly limited to the two-year plan period. The shorter plan period would thus ensure that the mandates reflected would be up-to-date. A two-year medium-term plan would reduce the time between the initial preparation of the plan to the end of the plan period by two years.

Budget outline

5. A shorter medium-term plan would be combined with the proposed programme budget outline. There would thus be one consolidated document on both programmes and resources. Decisions on programmes and preliminary estimates of resources could be taken in parallel, as they would be considered at the same time. This is particularly important from the perspective of ensuring full coherence as to the determination of priorities of a programmatic nature and those related to resource allocation. Currently, the United Nations operates two separate arrangements for the determination of priorities. By regulation 3.2, paragraph 1 (b), of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8), the Secretary-General is required to submit resource allocation priorities "reflecting general trends of a broad sectoral nature" in the context of the proposed budget outline every two years. By regulation 4.6 (c), the Secretary-General is also required to submit proposals on programme priorities in the context of the medium-term plan every four years. Thus, the General Assembly, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination, receives two separate priority recommendations from the Secretary-General. Given that a rational resource allocation system requires that resource priorities reflect programme priorities, it would improve the coherence of the system if priority recommendations were presented in the same physical document. This would facilitate the discussion of priorities in the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Fifth Committee and would help to ensure that resource allocation decisions better reflected programme priority needs. Priorities would continue to be specified at the same level of programmes and parts of the programme budget as are used in the current medium-term plan and programme budget outline.

Programme budget

6. The programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 is the first one formulated fully in accordance with the results-based format, namely, the articulation, prior to implementation, of the programme of objectives, expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement and external factors, in addition to the listing of outputs and resource requirements. It was prepared in January 2001, immediately after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 55/231 of 23 December 2000 on results-based budgeting. In that resolution, the Assembly decided that the measures approved in the resolution should be implemented in a gradual and incremental manner, in full compliance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning and the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

7. In line with the decision of the General Assembly to implement those measures gradually, the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 will immediately introduce a number of new elements, namely: (a) the identification of baseline and target data for measuring indicators of achievement; (b) the expansion of the results-based framework to the executive direction and management component of all programmes; and (c) the application of criteria in the budget formulation process to ensure that the outputs that are included are focused on and necessary for the achievement of expected accomplishments.

8. The 2004-2005 proposed programme budget to be presented to the General Assembly for review by the Fifth Committee will be shorter, as the individual section fascicles will be focused on the programmatic material and aggregated resource data, which constitutes the core material for each section. The annex to each section covering "indicative resource requirements", which provides technical details, would be made available separately to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to support their technical review of the estimates. The Fifth Committee would thus receive the full benefit of the Advisory Committee's scrutiny of the detailed level of resource requirements without losing sight of the policy issues highlighted in the results-oriented programme budget fascicles. The overall level of information provided in total for the justification of the programme budget will not change, but the intergovernmental review should become better focused through the channelling of relevant information according to the responsibility of each body concerned. In essence, the Fifth Committee would focus more on overall strategic issues rather than on technical details.

9. The foreword and introduction to the budget, including the annexes containing overview tables, would continue to be produced as a key component of the programme budget proposals for review by the Fifth Committee. The content of the foreword and introduction would be the subject of further examination in 2003, with a view to reflecting any improvements identified in the budget document for the biennium 2006-2007.

10. The presentation of objectives, expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement and outputs, as well as inputs/resources, in a consistent and clear logical framework will serve as an important tool for verifying the individual components and their relation to each other. This will improve the ability of Member States and programme managers to monitor the implementation and determine the effectiveness and ongoing relevance of activities by strengthening the link between desired results and resources. It will permit legislative bodies to focus more fully on

the programmatic review of the Organization and endorse or provide a clear policy direction.

Timing of the proposed strategic budget cycle

11. In line with the actions proposed, the next medium-term plan would be for a two-year period, namely, for the period 2006-2007, and would be combined with the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2006-2007. The proposed medium-term plan for this period would be submitted to the intergovernmental bodies overseeing the programmes in 2004. Decisions taken in 2004 on both the medium-term plan and the budget outline would be the basis for the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, which would be submitted for intergovernmental review in 2005.

Flexibility to reallocate resources

12. By action 21 (d), flexibility would be given to the Secretary-General to reallocate resources between programmes and between allocations for personnel and other allocations by up to 10 per cent within a single budget period.

13. Currently, in the resolution approving the appropriations for a given biennium, the General Assembly authorizes the Secretary-General to transfer credits between sections of the budget with the concurrence of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The proposal contained in action 21 (d) would permit the Secretary-General to transfer resources, including posts, between sections of the budget under his own authority as Chief Administrative Officer up to a limit of 10 per cent within a particular section of the budget. This flexibility would enable the Secretary-General to respond to unexpected changes in a prompt and efficient manner and would be exercised in exceptional circumstances. The Secretary-General would be accountable to the Assembly to report on the exercise of the flexibility authority on an annual basis through the first and second performance reports. The reporting mechanism in this case would be comparable to that presently followed in respect of the utilization of authorities granted under the unforeseen and extraordinary expenses resolution.

Evaluation and monitoring

14. The weakness of the current system is defined in detail in paragraphs 155 to 165 of the report of the Secretary-General.

15. The evaluation and monitoring system would be strengthened through the reorientation of evaluation and monitoring responsibilities to focus on results by tracking and evaluating accomplishments so as to help Member States determine whether overall programme objectives are being met. This would shift the emphasis from simply counting outputs to assessing, with the use of indicators of achievement, to what extent expected accomplishments have been realized. Quantitative and qualitative data will be integrated to form a complete analysis of the results achieved. This approach will involve the use of more rigorous self-evaluation by programme managers. Given that the 2002-2003 programme budget is already in the results-based format, this could be implemented in 2004 when the programme performance report for the biennium 2002-2003 is submitted to the Assembly.

Action 22

16. This action aims at streamlining the present duplicative process by allowing a single-stage intergovernmental review of the programme budget and the medium-term plan in conjunction with the budget outline. In this review process, the Fifth Committee would continue to receive the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as is currently the case. It would undertake the examination of the programmatic aspects of all budget-related documents, including the medium-term plan, the initial budget proposals and subsequent revised estimates and statements of programme budget implications. This would facilitate an integrated approach to programmatic and financial decision-taking.

17. The Fifth Committee could also perform other responsibilities of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Alternatively, the Committee for Programme and Coordination could continue to fulfil, as appropriate, its ongoing responsibility under the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning with regard to relevant components of the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, all evaluation and programme monitoring matters, all coordination questions, as well as reports of the Joint Inspection Unit. This would allow the Committee to focus better on lessons learned in programme implementation, particularly as reflected in in-depth evaluation reports and programme performance reports. It would also reinforce the proposal contained in action 21 (e) regarding better measurement of the impact of the work of the Organization.

18. It is envisaged that the Committee for Programme and Coordination would still meet in mid-year for a shortened session. Its reports on the matters mentioned above would continue to be submitted to its parent bodies, namely, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. Membership and participation arrangements would continue as at present, allowing the Committee to continue to be composed of members nominated by Members States for their expertise.

Action 23

19. Starting with the financial period 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004, peacekeeping budgets will be submitted in a results-based format that includes an overall objective derived from the missions' respective mandates, as well as expected accomplishments, indicators of achievement and planned outputs for all substantive components. Resource data will be more aggregated, with concentration on the elements of the results-based budget framework, and resource data will be linked to the expected accomplishments where possible. Budget documents will meet the established limit of 16 pages.

20. Peacekeeping missions will report on the achievement of expected accomplishments and planned outputs through the budget performance reports. Justifications of significant variances in resource levels will include, where possible, references to the missions' results.

21. The new format will also meet the criteria set out in resolution 55/220 C of 14 June 2001, in which the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure the use of objective-setting by the administrations of peacekeeping missions and also to ensure that the development and attainment of such objectives are reported to the Assembly through the financial performance reports of the missions.